



## CONFERENCE PAPER

# Religious Education Syllabuses for Secondary School Teachers in Zambia: Catholic Missionaries' Contributions

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### ABSTRACT

Though widely acknowledged that the role of teacher training institutions remains crucial in providing an understanding of the educational basis for Religious Education (RE) and in improving the overall quality of provision in schools, both theoretical and empirical exploration of the syllabuses prepared for teachers in Zambian higher education is scanty. Informed by an interpretative case study on the RE syllabus prepared for teachers at Zambia Catholic University (ZCU), the paper argues that by embracing and revising the syllabus from Nkrumah College of Education, ZCU exemplified the stakeholder interest and missionary contributions in safeguarding that which had been envisioned in teacher education.

### KEYWORDS

religious education, syllabus, teacher education, policies, Catholic education

## Introduction

Though widely acknowledged that the role of teacher training institutions remains crucial in providing an understanding of the educational basis for Religious Education (RE) and in improving the overall quality of provision in schools through the production of well trained, competent and enthusiastic teachers (Grimmit, 2010, p. 9), both theoretical and empirical exploration of the syllabuses prepared for teachers in higher education in Zambia is scanty.

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This is because the discourse on RE syllabuses in Zambia has been engrossed with the subject at the primary and secondary levels of the education system resulting in a neglect of what was obtained in teacher education. For example, while the RE primary and secondary school syllabuses have been critiqued (see Mudalitsa, 1995; Simuchimba, 2004), little has been done to explore the syllabuses in teacher education. This paper, therefore, investigated the RE syllabuses in teacher education to mirror how teachers were being prepared to teach the subject, and in turn draw lessons for present and future opportunities for RE in Zambia using the contributions of the Catholic missionaries to the subject.

This inquiry is deemed significant to those involved in RE teacher education as the study was an indirect response to the 2013 curriculum reforms which called for study areas in the teacher education curriculum to be linked to school curriculum by providing an understanding of how RE teachers were being trained (Curriculum Development Centre, 2012, p. 50). The paper also indirectly mirrors how stakeholders like missionaries and institutions have safeguarded the place of RE through the RE syllabus in teacher education.

Methodologically, the paper was informed by insights from an interpretive case study based on document analysis and interviews with purposively selected missionaries who contributed to the development of the RE syllabus for secondary school teachers in Zambia. The institution and syllabus were also purposively selected based on some peculiar attributes. For example, unlike other colleges and universities, Zambia Catholic University (ZCU) taught the syllabus as Religious Education and not Religious Studies and was developed by missionary teachers who had contributed to the development of RE in Zambia in numerous ways.

The syllabus was first used at Nkrumah and later revised and adapted by Ben Henze and John Mudalitsa for ZCU where they retired. Henze taught RE for over 15 years in primary teacher colleges and later became the RE advisor to the Inspectorate in the Ministry of Education (Henze, 2000, p. 1). Mudalitsa whose special interests are educational evaluation and religious discernment not only taught RE in secondary schools, but was also a lecturer at Nkrumah, the birthplace of secondary school RE in teacher education in Zambia, for 11 years before moving to ZCU where he contributed to the development of the syllabus under review until his retirement in 2016. Hence, this paper might reflect what some missionaries and educationists involved in the development of Zambian RE envisioned for RE in teacher education and in turn manifest the stakeholders' interest in the subject.

The key research question was centred on establishing what constituted the RE syllabus and what informed the inclusion of the content. The paper argues that the development of the RE syllabus at ZCU was informed by the missionary teacher's quest to synthesise religion and education in a context specific and relevant style that promoted learning about religions and learning from religions. By embracing the syllabus that was once considered as a model in teacher education at a time when all other institutions were transforming to teach Religious Studies, ZCU was a custodian of that which the missionary enterprise had envisioned for RE.

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## Context of Religious Education in Teacher Education

The birthplace of RE in teacher education is the Christian missionary enterprise (Mwale et al., 2014). RE in teacher education for primary and secondary school teachers is taught in both public and private colleges and universities. It was first taught in the secondary school programme at Kwame Nkrumah Teachers College in the 1970s, which was the first college to offer the RE programme for secondary school teachers (Carmody, 2004, p. vii). At the request of the Senior Inspector of RE to begin a RE department to facilitate the teaching of the RE syllabus in schools, Bro. George Poirier of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart who taught at Nkrumah from 1957–78 initiated the RE teacher education programme. The educational reforms which translated in the introduction of multi-faith RE syllabuses in Zambia and the 1996 Educational policy pointed to the need for a more educational approach to RE (Mudalitsa, 2002). Hence the initial syllabus which was more Christian orientated, was revised in 2000 through a consultative process that the Religious Education Consultative Group was instrumental in.

The revised syllabus was applauded and to be used as a model for other affiliate colleges (Simuchimba, personal communication to Nkrumah Teachers college, 20<sup>th</sup> May 2002). However, over time, Nkrumah migrated to teaching Religious Studies in the place of Religious Education, a trend noticeable in most institutions. ZCU was therefore of interest because in a context where institutions were moving towards Religious Studies as opposed to RE, the institution had retained and adapted RE as a programme in teacher education.

## Conceptualisation of Religious Education in Teacher Education

RE in teacher education is spoken as a curriculum subject with the educational aims of promoting religious literacy or a critical understanding of different religious traditions in Zambia (and the world) and helping to impart important life skills – for instance, critical and analytical thinking, logical argumentation, innovativeness, and respect and tolerance for other people's views, beliefs and values (Simuchimba, 2005, p. 7). This understanding relates to learning about religion and learning from religion when related to Grimmit's (1987) conceptualisation of learning about religions and learning from religions. Learning about religions is a type of RE where teaching and learning have a non-confessional foundation and are based on the academic discipline of religious studies, while learning from religions highlights the potential for personal development through RE touching upon life issues of an existential character and provides opportunities for students to reflect on their views in relation to the various answers religions provide to these questions (Grimmit, 1987; Teece, 2010). The paper sought to show how the RE syllabus at ZCU reflected the quest to promote learning about and learning from religions in teacher education.

## The RE Syllabus for Teachers at Zambia Catholic University

As alluded to earlier, the RE syllabus at Zambia Catholic University was developed and adapted on the premise of the synthesis between religion and education. Mudalitsa (2000, p. 10) opines that RE is neither a study of the Bible nor a study of world religions. He advocates for fusing the best of religion and the best of education to produce RE that is capable of contributing towards the integral development of each individual learner and Zambia's brighter future. Mudalitsa (2002) argues that RE needed to be in line with the latest national education policy and related to the context in order to promote the aims and content of the educational policies. Mudalitsa recalls that the courses included in the ZCU RE syllabus were started at Nkrumah in order to enable students to get the best of RE. The courses were developed further at ZCU through the encouragement of Ben Henze (Personal Communication, November, 2017).

In terms of content, the syllabus developed by the Catholic missionaries at ZCU had three major components. The first component was on foundations of RE and covered Introduction to RE; Psychology of RE; Sociology of RE; Science and religion; and Ecumenism and RE (Science and religion; and Ecumenism and RE were new additions to the old Nkrumah syllabus). Introduction to RE was designed to enable student teachers to understand RE in theory and practice by exposing them to what was deemed as RE at its best in the world today. The course also explored the history of RE in Zambia, its strengths and weaknesses, and its vast potential for improvement. Psychology of RE was focussed on helping student teachers to link how RE promoted the full development of the human personality. It addressed aspects such as the complexities of human growth, factors of human flourishing in psychology, religion and tradition, stages of human development in psychology, and religion's transformative power using personality examples from different religious traditions such as Desmond Tutu and Jesus of Nazareth. Sociology of RE was concerned with enabling student teachers to think wisely about social issues and make RE a powerful instrument for social transformation. This was addressed by exploring the overview of social issues in Zambia and Africa, and uncovering ways that fostered positive thinking, fight against corruption, disease and other societal ills and sound interpersonal relationships including leadership skills. Science and religion was aimed at showing how the relationship between the world of science and the "quality of life" challenged RE to update itself critically and creatively (MoE, 1996, p. 5). This was achieved by assessing the world of science and technology, analysing scientific theories and religious beliefs, and discussing intelligently if, for example, the universe came by accident or design, or the life on earth was a product of evolution or creation. Ecumenism and RE was focussed on enabling student teachers to make a dynamic synthesis of all they had learnt in RE and in turn use RE to promote ecumenism and fight fundamentalism. This was achieved by showing the similarities and differences between religions, and distinguishing "good" and "bad" religion to promote the spirit of dialogue and ecumenism, and fight fundamentalism.

Other than these foundational courses, the syllabus also covered four of the religions found in Zambia, unlike the old Nkrumah syllabus which addressed other world religions. These were Christianity, African Traditional Religion (ATR), Islam and Hinduism. The decision to include these religions was informed by the 1977 educational national reforms and the secondary school syllabuses themselves (MoE, 1977). The topics covered under each religion included its history, scriptures and contemporary issues.

### **RE Teacher Education Syllabus as a Mirror of Stakeholders' Interest in the Subject**

The choice of the content and justification for the content manifest not only the developers' interests and perspectives for the subject, but also institutional support for what was deemed as RE that would produce competent teachers. It was also an example of what the missionary enterprise had envisioned for RE in teacher education in recent times.

To begin with, the syllabus reflects the quest for RE to be in line with national education policies because of the understanding that RE is a synthesis of religion and education (Hull, 1991). As such, the syllabus was informed by both international and local education policies, including the principles governing Catholic universities (1965 Declaration on Christian education, the 1990 encyclical on Catholic Universities: *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* among others). For example, with the 1996 *Educating our Future* policy document in place, Henze believed that RE needed to progress within that framework (Henze, White Fathers archives, unpublished manuscript). Henze and others saw an opportunity in the policy's emphasis on life skills for RE to enable learners to grow to maturity through the development of a more life skills-based syllabus and textbooks, and the formulation of a deeper way of examining the subject.

The choice of content was also informed by what was prevailing in the secondary school RE and teacher education. The observations of student RE teachers on teaching practice and surveys of learners' experiences over time manifested concerns linked to the student teachers' inability to teach in a contextualised manner (Mudalitsa, 2002, pp. 13–16). The content itself was also in need of radical change (Mudalitsa, 2002, pp. 23–26). Hence, other than ZCU exposing students to the religions in the school syllabuses, the syllabus was critical of secondary school RE syllabuses in present day Zambia.

Furthermore, the content of the RE secondary school syllabuses influenced the choice of the content. The two syllabuses covered four religions (ATR, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism) based on the 1977 reforms. Mudalitsa affirmed that RE syllabuses being used in Zambian schools and colleges today are products of the Educational Reforms of 1977 when Zambia saw a fundamental reform of the education system in conformity with Zambian Humanism (Mudalitsa, 2002, p. 24). This was an attempt to adopt a multi-faith (although more would have been done to introduce students to many other religions) approach not only in terms of covering the four religions, but also the approach taken to study the religions that promoted religious literacy and

discernment in Zambia's pluralistic society. In addition, the state of RE in teacher education was a factor in developing, adapting and retaining the syllabus at ZCU.

Even our higher institutions of learning have contributed to the current state of RE in the country. Until early 2000, Nkrumah Religious Education syllabus consisted mainly of Biblical studies... RE for Nkrumah graduates meant a study of the Bible. ...University of Zambia (UNZA) does not offer Religious Education but Religious Studies only; as a result, RE for UNZA graduates means a study of world religions. (Mudalitsa, 2000, p. 10)

The stakeholder's interest in supporting the RE they envisioned for teacher education did not only end at developing and adapting the syllabus, but in securing teaching and learning materials. Publications by Fr. Henze and Fr. Mujdrlica (Mudalitsa) have proven useful to students studying RE owing to a dearth of literature on the subject in the country. Fr. Carmody's books on religion and education meant for colleges and universities have constituted required reading for students.

## Conclusion

The paper explored the RE syllabus in teacher education developed by the Catholic missionary enterprise in Zambia to demonstrate their interest as stakeholders both at individual and institutional levels with reference to Zambia Catholic University. At the inception of ZCU teacher education programme, the old Nkrumah RE syllabus was revised and adapted in pursuit of synthesising religion and education. By this, the syllabus manifested the quest to move from learning about religions to learning from religions as RE not only provided religious literacy, but also provided opportunities for students to reflect on their views in relation to the various religions' answers to the ultimate questions. By embracing and revising the syllabus from Nkrumah, ZCU exemplified the stakeholder interest and missionary contributions in safeguarding that which they had envisioned for RE in teacher education.

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